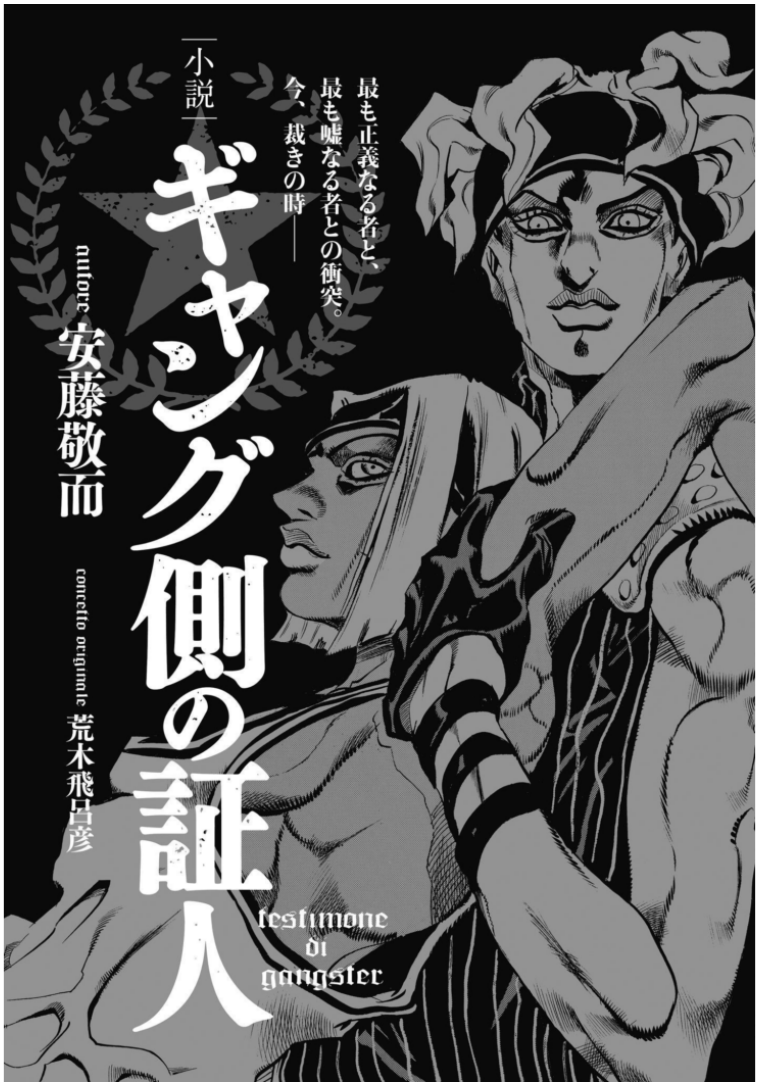
最も正義なる者と、
最も嘘なる者との衝突。
今、裁きの時――
―小説―
ギャング側の証人
testimone di gangster
autore 安藤敬而
concetto originale 荒木飛呂彦

testimone di gangster

The Witness for the Gangsters (testimone di gangster) – a novel
autore – **Keiji Ando** concetto originale – **Hirohiko Araki**
Published in JOJO magazine 2022 WINTER
Translator – Cinda (Originally hosted on jojo-news.com)

Chapter 1

Palermo, the largest city on the island of Sicily, looked over the glittering blue sea to the east. A market near the harbor opened early in the morning and sold fresh fish, and countless hotels and ristorantes catered to tourists.

In the lively town center, one building was especially prominent; it towered over all the rest like a fortress. This was the Palermo Courthouse—and today, the plaza in front of it was filled with a crowd of photographers and journalists.

Inside the courthouse walls, it was just as packed. Several security guards stood at the first-floor courtroom entrance. Security was unusually tight, with every entrant being subjected to a thorough search of even their shirt pockets and bags before passing through.

Currently, a skinny young man with a bandana wrapped around his head was being checked at the front of the line. The guard pulled a thermos from the man's bag.

"What's in this?"

The man screwed off the cap, poured coffee inside of it, and took a swig right in front of the guard.

"It's just coffee."

"You're good to go," responded the guard.

Before passing through the doors into the courtroom, the man stopped in his tracks. A bronze statue stood in front of the doorway. The statue was of a goddess of justice holding a sword and a book of law. Its expression overflowed with both elegance and severity,

making it seem as if it was judging every person who came into the courtroom.

Seeing this, a look of absolute boredom rose to the man's face.

What a joke. This place is as far from God as it gets.

There were over three hundred seats available for both the press and the public. The man chose an empty chair in the front row.

This is even more crowded than the first hearing was. Guess people weren't exaggerating about how much attention this trial would draw.

After all, this massive trial being held against gang members was an event not to be missed.

The man looked around the room. The judge's bench stood at the front of the room. Across from it, the prosecution bench sat to the right and the defense bench to the left.

A cage was installed in the wall behind the spectator area. Currently, it was empty, but it held the defendant during a criminal trial. This was a custom of several countries' courts of law, Italy included.

The concept of placing defendants whose criminal status was still hanging in the balance in cages was looked down upon by some, who claimed that it could color trial participants' opinions. Still, the custom persisted, as many defendants were part of a group of despicable criminals prepared to incite violence—a gang. A large courtroom like this was able to host trials with many defendants. One such example was the "Great Gang Trial" that had occurred seven years before. Over 220 gang members were declared guilty. The trial occurring today had 32 defendants—a small number in comparison, but it garnered much more attention.

Well, that's to be expected, what with our prosecutor and defendants

being…

Suddenly, the courtroom filled with murmurs. The doors facing the prosecution bench swung open.

A well-built man in the prime of his life walked in.

Speak of the devil… Here's Prosecutor Falco.

He was more well-known than the star athletes who participated in the Serie A, a frequent sight in the newspapers and on TV. This was Gilberto Falco, the prosecutor appointed to this trial. Journalists' camera shutters clicked.

The Italian government had suddenly descended into corruption ten years ago. It was rotten down to its unseen core. Gangs had been enjoying free roam of the country for a long time. Ever since the 1950s, they had been making a fortune off of the drug trade and expanding their region of influence. Incidents of gang and government collusion were common. There was no escape once a government official involved themselves with gangs, and those who tried to expose these collusions were mercilessly retaliated against. In the end, the partnership between these gangs and the government remained unbroken.

Prosecutor Falco was the one to finally put the scalpel to this festering wound on society. He was prepared to boldly face this challenge, despite the fact that in doing so, he would put his own life in danger. First, he set his sights on a smaller gang. He targeted members who wanted a way out, or "converts", and promised them his protection. He guaranteed the well-being of their loved ones as well, which was enough to convince them to divulge information.

Falco had been nicknamed "The Seducer" by the public. When he looked into gangs, he never made light of his informants' issues. He believed in treating them as fellow human beings and seeing their true selves. Sometimes his investigations would go on for over two years as he coaxed vast amounts of information out of people who

wouldn't crack even under police interrogation.

Beginning with Cosa Nostra, all of the gangs soon came to know of Falco's existence—and by that time, he had too much power for one individual to hold. Even if they wanted to have him assassinated, it would be a very difficult task. The man had dozens of guards watching over his surroundings 24 hours a day. Falco himself stayed barricaded in a windowless room, leaving as rarely as he could. If a place had anything less than the most stringent of security, Falco would never be seen there.

Most of these journalists and spectators must have their sights on Falco, then.

Last time, they had come to see him at work during the first public hearing.

Today, the second public hearing would play out…

Now they want to see Falco slip up, I guess.

The skin between Falco's brows wrinkled deeply. He had never made such an intense expression in a public place. His cheeks were sunken in; overall, he looked quite haggard.

The doors behind the defendant's table opened. Five men walked out, led by the case's lawyer, and took their seats. The corners of the lawyer's mouth curled upwards; Falco, on the other hand, seemed calm.

Coming in next were prison officers, followed by the handcuffed defendants. Their appearances varied drastically. Petty hoodlums, sickly young men, people so obese their chins were imperceptible, hunched old men, and young women were all among the group. The officers all worked to cram the defendants into the cage at the back of the courtroom. There were 32 defendants in total—32 people who were suspected of being members of the gang Passione.

Finally, the doors facing the judge's bench opened, and the judges came out, dressed in their robes.

The courtroom fell into absolute silence.

"All rise. Court is now in session."

The bailiff's solemn voice echoed as he spoke into the microphone.

The young man in the spectator area stood up, along with everyone else. He turned his gaze to the defendant's table. A man with deeply tanned skin stood next to the lawyer. The name of this man who appeared to be the lawyer's apprentice, who nobody in the court gave a second glance, was Tizzano. He was a member of Passione.

"…gonna kill him," the young man muttered, his gaze fixed on the fellow member of his own gang.

The basic idea of this trial was quite simple.

The goal of Falco, the prosecution, was to have all 32 of the defendants declared guilty of being members of Passione.

The goal of Tizzano, the defense, was to have all 32 of the defendants declared not guilty.

And the goal of this man from Passione was…

…*Kill Tizzano with my ability. That's what my leader ordered me to do.*

Thus began the second hearing of a great trial that would go down in Italian history.

Chapter 2

Passione was a gang that had gained prominence in Italy in recent years. It appeared as if to fill the gap that the declining Cosa Nostra left behind. People said its members numbered in the tens, hundreds, or even over a thousand—even the police had no idea of its true scale.

But Falco and his team declared that they had managed to successfully capture 32 members of the enigmatic Passione. This trial would expose Passione's true scale; the nation's eyes were on it before it even began.

The one who leaked all of this information about Passione to Falco was a man named Pollo, a bank employee working in Palermo.

"I am a member of Passione. Please, you must find some way to stop this organization."

Both Falco and the police had known of Pollo's existence for some time. In the past, he had been arrested for the accounting work he did for a certain small gang but was released due to insufficient evidence.

He turned himself in and offered the authorities the plain truth of what was happening in his current gang.

"Passione is starting up a massive new drug ring. They're going to let even women, children, and innocents get caught up in it. I can't bear this responsibility any longer…"

Pollo claimed that Passione hired him for his valuable accounting skills. He worked in money laundering for the gang. His job was to funnel money entrusted to him by Passione members to overseas bank accounts and then back into their own. Pollo had taken advantage of a loophole left by the Italian tax offices, a method that would have likely gone unnoticed for some time had he never come forward. When Italian police carried out an investigation, they

found many transactions of unknown origin; there were no clear signs they traced back to countries such as Switzerland, but the gang's transaction routes were generally exposed.

The banks of some countries such as Switzerland were not willing to divulge information about their operations to Italian police, and several transactions could not be traced back to a source, but most of the routes were discovered. The 32 gang members involved in this money laundering had been arrested all over Italy.

However, every single person who had been arrested denied any affiliation to Passione. There was also no other significant evidence that could be tied to the defendants. In 1982, Italian lawmakers passed the "La Torre" act to combat gang-related crime. This made it easier to pursue criminal charges against gangs, a difficult task up until then. With Falco's team's skills, the 32 defendants were able to be indicted as members of Passione.

In truth, both Pollo and the 32 people in custody were indeed members of Passione. After Pollo's unforeseen rebellion, this came as a massive blow for the growing gang. They had an *omertà* , a code of silence—every member was sworn to secrecy upon joining the gang. But if somebody among those 32 broke that code, the ripple effect could shake the gang to its very core. Passione needed to find a way to stop the trial.

This matter had been left in the hands of the team that both this young man and Tizzano affiliated themselves with. At first, their leader planned to have both Pollo the traitor and Falco the prosecutor killed. Falco may have been under the police's protection, but with the team's abilities, getting to him would be a cinch.

But Tizzano had harbored doubts about this plan.

"If we kill Pollo and Falco, it's the same as admitting that those 32 people are members of Passione."

His leader asked whether he had a better idea, and Tizzano calmly spoke his reply.

“We’ll beat Falco at the trial. That traitor Pollo is going to rescind his testimony. Much of the 32 members’ indictments rests entirely on Pollo’s word. With the foundation of all those accusations destroyed, there’s no telling where the trial will go next. There’s a chance we can win.”

It sounded like a joke. The plan was about as believable as a child’s boasts that they would become a Serie A star someday. To start with, there was the fact that Pollo’s testimony would never be overturned. He was a valuable asset to the prosecution, and he was under strict protection at a prison. There was no way they could reach him.

But the leader agreed to the proposal. He assigned Tizzano to lead the operation. “I trust you,” he said, and it was decided. Until now, he had made his dislike of Tizzano obvious; the other young man was beside himself with disbelief.

Later, the leader summoned the young man alone and told him this:

“It doesn’t matter whether the mission ends in success or failure. You are to kill Tizzano when the trial is over.”

The leader had never trusted Tizzano at all. As an old-fashioned gangster, he valued violence and believed it to be the only way to run an organization. It appeared Tizzano’s suggestion that they could defeat their opponents in court had incited his wrath.

Keep up the act as if he was still working alongside Tizzano while secretly preparing to kill him—that was the young man’s mission.

Several days ago, the first public hearing took place, bringing crowds of spectators and journalists into the courtroom. The aim during this event was to help Falco believe he could win, and they had succeeded.

Upon entering the courtroom, Falco had seemed relaxed, chatting with a detective he was acquainted with.

The 32 defendants' identities were established, and the prosecution read the complaint.

Next came the questioning of the witnesses. The one to come up to the witness's stand was none other than the star of this case, Pollo of Passione. Prosecutor Falco attempted to begin his questioning.

But suddenly, the lawyer across the room threw his hand into the air and cried out.

"I have a declaration to make! We will prove to you that these defendants are declared not guilty!"

At this inopportune outburst, the courtroom fell into an awkward silence.

"Defense, please refrain from speaking out of turn," warned a judge. Stifled laughter could be heard from the spectator area. The lawyer apologized and sank back into his seat, dejected.

Tizzano, who had ordered the lawyer, sat next to him with a composed expression. It appeared the only spectator who noticed was his collaborator.

"Now, let's all settle down." Even Prosecutor Falco couldn't stop himself from laughing with the rest of the court, but he put an end to it. "Mr. Pollo, I'd like to confirm your position. Please state the gang you were affiliated with for the record."

At Falco's query, Pollo was silent for a long time.

"Mr. Pollo? Did you not hear me? There's no need to be nervous. Please just answer naturally and truthfully. What gang were you affiliated with?"

After another stretch of silence, Pollo answered.

"…No, I wasn't with any gang."

"Good. Now let's continue… Hm? P-Pardon me, but what did you say just now?"

Pollo answered Falco's question.

"I have never been affiliated with any gangs. Of course, the 32 people in this cage behind me are the same way! Everything I've said up until now was completely fabricated. All 32 defendants are not guilty—I made up the entire thing."

Pollo, who had been an informant, was suddenly taking back his entire testimony here in court. In court, a witness agrees on the contents of their testimony with the summoning party prior to the trial. This event came as a complete shock to the prosecution.

No matter how many times the prosecution repeated their question to Pollo, he simply shook his head. He stubbornly denied every statement he had made up until then.

After the courtroom was overtaken by chaos, a judge gave the order and forced the court to adjourn. The second public hearing had been postponed.

It was just as Tizzano had declared—the witness had rescinded his own testimony.

But even then, the young man's orders remained the same.

Act as calm as you like… Once this trial is over, I'll kill you.

Chapter 3

Today, the second public hearing was about to take place. The first hearing had been covered all throughout Italy as a national sensation. There were even headlines making extreme claims about Falco's downfall and the trial's future.

"Now then, will the witness please proceed to the stand?"

"…Yes."

At the judge's summoning, a man surrounded by prison officers—the witness, Pollo—stood up. His face was already lean to begin with, but now it was even more gaunt. He looked like an entirely different person from the witness of the first hearing.

"Now, witness, can you tell us your name and background?"

"Pollo Albatero, born July 7th, 1958, on the Sicilian island of Lipari. I was a bank worker up until two years ago."

As the questioning was picking up where it had left off, it was the defense's turn to question the witness. The lawyer sitting next to Tizzano got to his feet. He raised his hand straight up into the air. Pollo had a look of fear on his face as he watched him. The lawyer had a question for Pollo.

"So, Mr. Pollo, I'd like to ask you about your testimony. You accused the 32 defendants of this case of being members of Passione. Am I correct?"

After a brief pause, Pollo nodded, looking straight ahead.

"…Yes. It's true that I made that statement."

“And you are certain that they are all members of Passione?”

At the lawyer’s query, Pollo thought for a long time, then shook his head.

“…No.”

Loudly pushing back his chair, Falco jumped to his feet.

“Are you saying that you lied to the prosecution?”

“…Yes. Everything in my testimony was a lie.”

“Your Honor, I object!” shouted Falco from the prosecution bench.

“The defense will refrain from leading the witness in an effort to get a certain answer. Please cease your line of questioning.”

“Your Honor, allow me to emphasize that these questions are an important part of the process to getting to the heart of this chaotic case. I would also like to express that I have no intention to lead the witness whatsoever.”

The judge nodded at the lawyer’s answer.

“The prosecution’s objection has been overruled. Defense, please continue.”

Falco sat back down in his chair, grimacing.

Seeing this, the young man in the spectator area tilted his head.

It’s not like a veteran like Falco to make an objection like that. He seems like he’d normally let this kind of thing go. Is he getting flustered? Well, it’s no wonder…

After the first hearing came to a close, Pollo the witness had firmly kept his lips sealed. The prosecution had never managed to have a fruitful conversation with him until now, and it had no idea why he had suddenly overturned his own testimony.

The lawyer took the microphone and continued the questioning.

“Now, let’s continue. Mr. Pollo, why did you commit an act of perjury?”

“…Prosecutor Falco pressured me to.”

Murmurs rippled through the spectator area. All of the journalists began scribbling in their notebooks at once. The judge called for order in the court.

“Could you tell us the specifics of the situation as you remember them?”

“Y-Yes, Your Honor… As far as I can tell, it seems to have something to do with my past career.”

“Your past career? Would you be able to tell us more about your work history?”

“Y-Yes, Your Honor. During my time as a bank teller, I was also secretly engaging in money laundering with my clients.”

“Were you aware of the illegality of those acts?”

“Yes, I was.”

“And you continued with them despite that?”

“I was receiving margins from my clients for the work. It seems Prosecutor Falco was able to trace the flow of assets. While I wasn’t

prosecuted a second time, my past arrest didn't do me any favors. He took advantage of my weakness."

"Is it true that you assisted the defendants in money laundering schemes?"

"Yes, it is."

"But you have no connection with the defendants, and you have never heard of the gang called Passione?"

"I had heard of them. However, I've completely washed my hands of gang business. I have no knowledge of the defendants' relationships with one another, nor where their money is going. All I did was work with each one separately to launder money."

"Objection!" Falco raised his hand. "The witness's statements massively contradict those offered to the prosecution. I would like to review Exhibit B-7.

In relation to the indictment, the prosecution had gathered evidence in their investigations and searches and presented it to the judges. Exhibit B-7 was a record of Falco interviewing Pollo. The conversation was presented in writing.

"This conversation between Pollo and I was transcribed by a clerk. Please review page 5. It states that Pollo himself called his clients members of Passione. I believe this makes it clear that the witness's remarks heavily diverge from the truth."

The lawyer smiled smugly.

"The defense believes that Exhibit B-7 is the record that diverges from the truth."

"What…?"

“Normally, spoken interviews are recorded by way of a tape recorder. However, the prosecution failed to do so with Exhibit B-7. Instead, the exhibit is limited to a court reporter’s abbreviated record of proceedings. Do these not seem like unnatural methods?”

“If you’d like to know why a tape recorder wasn’t used, it’s noted in the script that the one in the prosecution’s possession was broken at the time of the interview, hence the need for a court reporter’s transcription! In addition, records written by court reporters are recognized in a court of law—they are by no means illegal.”

The judge nodded after hearing Falco’s rebuttal.

“These are valid claims. The defense will acknowledge that the prosecution’s record is legal.”

“…Understood, Your Honor. But still, I wonder. There is no evidence to support the fact that the tape recorder was broken. Is it not a possibility that the prosecution simply put that on the record to dissuade suspicions of it being broken on purpose?”

“What the hell are you talking about?! Prosecutor Falco would never do such a thing! That’s a baseless claim!”

The shout echoing across the courtroom came from the young prosecutor sitting next to Falco.

“Prosecution, please refrain from speaking out of turn.”

“…M-My apologies.”

After his passionate outburst, the prosecutor bowed his head. The way he had just spoken, along with the warning passed down from the judges, greatly worsened the prosecution’s impression.

Now the defense went on to rub salt into the wound.

“According to Mr. Pollo’s testimony, he was coerced into perjury by Prosecutor Falco. In that case, how can we say that the evidence gathered from the accused is legitimate? It’s possible that the records of money laundering were all fabricated. In this country’s courts, an admission of gang relations leads to a reduced sentence. In past trials, a significant number of defendants confessed their guilt. Nevertheless, the 32 defendants in this trial all insist they are innocent, and that is proof in and of itself.”

To summarize the lawyer’s claims, the prosecution did not stop at pressuring the witness to give false testimony, but also fabricated the evidence that led to the defendants’ arrests.

This sounds like way too exaggerated of a plot to be true… but his claims hold water.

Supporting the lawyer’s outrageous claims, much of the submitted evidence in this case was dependent on Pollo’s testimony. Prosecutor Falco had completely changed from how he seemed during the Great Gang Trial. Now, it was beginning to look like he had built an entire case on perjury.

“The defense has no further questions.”

The lawyer sat back in his seat, looking satisfied. It was all according to the hypothesis of the composed-looking man sitting next to him, Tizzano.

The whole trial is going according to his plan…

Originally, this would have marked the end of Pollo’s questioning, but due to the chaos of the first hearing, a request by the prosecution to question him once again was approved.

“I’m Prosecutor Falco.”

He fired off questions with a stern expression. His face looked as if

it had aged ten years since the last hearing.

“Mr. Pollo, you seemed to want to be very cooperative with us up until now. Why did you decide to change your testimony so suddenly during the first hearing? I’d like to hear your reasoning.”

“…Prosecutor Falco, I thought you would of all people know best,” Pollo murmured as he looked away.

“What do you mean by that?”

“Until now, I’ve been under strict surveillance by both you and the police. I had guards following me constantly, even waiting outside of the door when I was in the bathroom. I had no freedom, not even a single person I could call a friend. But there are countless spectators in this court, along with the impartial clerks of the court. There’s no need for me to give false testimony anymore. I promised to tell the whole truth, and nothing but the truth!”

“…!”

Falco grit his teeth, looking frustrated.

The rest of the questioning went the same way. Falco urged Pollo to tell the truth, but he simply shook his head. It was like an arm-wrestling match between one reputation and another. Time dragged on; it seemed almost as if Falco was trying to buy himself time. Even some of the spectators began to show their irritation.

“Objection, Your Honor,” called the lawyer. “The prosecution has been repeatedly asking questions that stray from the original purpose of the case. The defense does not believe this to be a productive use of our time in court. I request a warning be given to cease at once or question the witness effectively.”

“Objection sustained. Prosecution, please change your line of questioning.”

"…Understood, Your Honor."

Prosecutor Falco nodded silently. The man, once known for his piercing, hawklike gaze, was now a shadow of his former self. All that stood there now was a tired old horse.

"One more question. Mr. Pollo, you made an oath at the beginning of the trial, yes? You swore to tell the whole, unobscured truth. Could you say that oath again for us?"

"…Of course I could, and that's exactly what I plan to do."

"Even if your own family was here watching you?"

"…I have no blood relatives."

Pollo explained that his parents had passed away when he was young. He left the witness stand and returned to his seat.

Accusatory glances fell on Falco from the spectators after he asked the rude question.

Looks like this case is already decided.

The young man in the spectator area exhaled. It'd take a miracle for Falco to get his underdog story now. The ball was entirely in their court now. All of the defendants would probably need to be re-investigated now as well.

Next up was yet another witness cross-examination. Apparently, the prosecution had found witnesses other than Pollo. The judge called this witness to come up to the stand. However, the courtroom remained silent.

"…Prosecution, has the witness still not arrived?"

“Apologies, Your Honor. It appears there’s been a delay.”

Murmurs erupted in the courtroom once again. Now a witness was late to court? The whole system was falling apart. Even the clerks, who should have been bringing order, seemed somewhat annoyed.

“Well then, the prosecution’s witness testimony is hereby postponed to…”

As the judge spoke, the courtroom doors swung open. Between two men who looked like detectives stood a woman. She looked to be in her thirties. Her hair was frazzled, and her clothes looked somewhat unkempt. She seemed composed, but her overall look gave a slight impression of dirtiness.

“Sorry to keep you waiting, Prosecutor Falco!” shouted one of the detectives, an older man in a messy coat. He gave Falco a thumbs-up. Falco returned the gesture, smiling. It seemed the two knew each other.

Over in the prosecution bench, Falco got to his feet, full of newfound vigor.

“Your Honor, I apologize for the wait. This woman is our witness.”

For some reason, his expression was full of life.

What’s with that attitude? Is there something special that woman’s bringing to…

Just then, the young man came to a realization. The lawyer, previously so full of confidence, was now growing pale. Tizzano sat next to him with his hand covering his mouth.

Tizzano… No way. Is that what’s happening here?

Many of the spectators didn't grasp what was happening yet, but the young man was beginning to. This woman held some incredibly important information—the key to the entire case.

"Are you all right? You seem out of breath…"

"Yes, I'm fine," the woman answered in a husky voice.

"First, please state your name and background for the record."

"I'm Melissa Collina. I was born March 26th, 1966. I live in Sicily… My husband and I run an arancini shop in Salina."

Salina was one of the islands of the Eolie archipelago.

The young man's hunch was correct.

Pollo said he was born in Lipari during his questioning… That's another one of the islands of the Eolie archipelago.

Falco began his questioning of the woman.

"Now, I'd like to ask you a few questions. There's no need to worry. Just relax and answer what I ask honestly."

"A-All right…"

"Please take a look behind you."

In the spectator seats behind the woman, Pollo trembled. Pollo and she stared at one another for a moment.

"Do you know the man sitting in that chair?"

"Yes, I've seen him before. But I don't remember his name…"

“Can you recall where you saw him?”

“At the shop I run. He comes about once a year. He’s a very good customer. I never forgot his face, since he always seemed to enjoy my food.”

“What kind of impression did you get from him?”

“I don’t really remember speaking to him… but he seemed like a nice man to me.”

“Thank you very much. The prosecution has no further questions.”

“…Defense, are you all right with the questioning ending here?”

The clerk’s eyes were wide.

“Yes. As stated before, the prosecution has completed its questioning… and it also appears that the witness is quite exhausted. If the defense is finished with its questioning, it would be best to take her out of court right away.”

An awkward silence filled the courtroom. It was likely most of the spectators had no idea why. The information gained through this testimony was practically worthless. All they had learned was that Pollo had been the woman’s customer.

Now, it was the defense’s turn to question the witness, but they weren’t doing that. The lawyer’s face was white as a sheet. His whole body shook as he stood in front of the microphone, saying nothing.

“…Why?” he finally choked out in a strained voice. “Why are you here?”

The woman stared at him, puzzled.

Having nothing more to say, the lawyer sat back down in his chair. He didn't answer when the judge addressed him. The defense's questioning was ruled to be finished.

The woman was immediately led out of the courthouse doors by the detectives. As soon as she left, the seated Pollo's hand suddenly shot up. All of the fear he had been showing a moment ago had vanished. He looked triumphant as he stretched his hand into the air.

"What is it, witness?"

"Your Honor, if I may… There's something I forgot to state earlier. May I have the time to declare it now?"

The judges exchanged glances and held a quick conversation.

"…Your request is approved. Please keep it brief."

Pollo got to his feet. As he walked to the witness stand, he looked over at the prosecution bench. Falco returned his gaze. Their expressions were very different from before. They seemed less tense. It was as if they were two old friends from school reuniting years later.

Don't tell me Falco found out…?

The young man put a hand over his mouth. Were that the case, it would all make sense. The way the lawyer's face had grown pale, the way Falco and Pollo were acting towards one another, and the meaningless testimony from before—all of it.

Why had Pollo suddenly rebelled against the prosecution?

It could only be because he was secretly collaborating with Passione.

That woman… I remember now. Pollo's younger sister was kidnapped by Passione!

Chapter 4

It happened before the first hearing. The young man and Tizzano sat across from each other outside a cafe, planning their strategy.

"Have you ever thought about why Pollo the witness betrayed the gang?"

The young man gave Tizzano's question some thought but couldn't come up with a definite answer.

"Probably because he's a coward. Is there really any proper answer to that?"

"Every factor here has a cause-and-effect relationship. Let's say Pollo was suspicious of Passione from the start. But if we assume he only decided to betray the gang then, there had to be something that pressured him into making that choice. That's the natural train of thought."

"Timing… You think that matters here? Passione's been growing at a good pace. Even our drug networks are gaining more and more territory…"

Tizzano covered the young man's lips with a finger.

"That's it."

"…What is?"

“By virtue of being a money launderer, Pollo got to see where the gang’s funds were moving, even though he was at the bottom of the food chain. It looks like he also knew where the gang was going to expand to next before it happened. Just before he went running to the police, he learned which place Passione had next on its list…”

“Sicily… Right, that’s where he grew up.”

The young man looked at the file on the table. It explained Pollo’s background in precise detail. Tizzano had hired a private eye to look into him. The man was an only child; his parents had divorced and passed away when he was young.

“Very insightful of you. So, he uses his time off to go to a certain shop on the Sicilian island of Salina every year. It’s just a simple little arancini shop. They researched the wife of this shop’s owner, and… it turns out she’s his half-sister. What’s more, it seems she doesn’t even know about their relationship. We’re going to abduct her and use her to intimidate Pollo. There’s a distinctive ring she always wears—actually gifted to her by Pollo in secret—and I’m going to have the lawyer raise his hand while wearing it. That way, he’ll see it for certain.”

“Are those kinds of intimidation tactics going to work? If Falco knows about Pollo’s little sister…”

“That won’t happen. If Pollo had told the prosecutor all about it, he would have made sure she was under strict protection. But the woman had no such activity around her. Perhaps Pollo was wary of Passione infiltrating the police. Instead of going out of his way to have her guarded, it was safer to not tell anyone about her at all.

Tizzano’s plan bore fruit. At the first public hearing, Pollo had seen the lawyer’s ring and gone pale. But had Pollo thought his younger sister had been captured, or had he understood that the gang was trying to intimidate him into believing they had her? They couldn’t know for sure. The important thing was that he understood that the lawyer knew of his little sister’s existence.

Pollo overturned his testimony on the spot. He did it to protect the one he cared for.

Pollo's little sister was supposed to have been abducted by people hired by Passione and locked in a warehouse in the market. Despite that, the woman was standing right here before their very eyes.

This can only mean that Falco caught on and had her rescued…

Tizzano looked at the lawyer, covering his mouth with a hand.

The young man recalled what his leader had said.

"…Kill Tizzano. That show-off's worthless Stand could never be of any use to us."

It's now or never…!

The young man dropped his empty thermos. The cylindrical thermos rolled down towards the railing. A guard standing behind the railing picked it up and carried it back to the man.

"Sorry about that."

When the young man looked up, Pollo had just come up to the witness stand. He held a bottle of mineral water in his hand. It was

unopened. He screwed off the top and took a sip. After catching his breath, he began.

"…Please, allow me to make the oath. I solemnly swear to abide by both moral and judicial law and to truthfully share with the court whatever I know."

"I am Prosecutor Falco. By renewing your oath, do you acknowledge the testimony you gave before to be perjury?"

"Yes."

Murmurs rippled through the courtroom.

"I know I have brought this court into disarray many times; I do not expect you all to have any trust left in me. Nevertheless, I beg of you—let me speak. There was a reason I couldn't speak the truth until now."

"O-Objection, Your Honor!" shouted the lawyer. "T-The witness's questioning has already come to a close. Having the witness testify again will only confuse the court more! Please have the witness escorted from the stand immediately. C-Court ought to be adjourned for—"

"The defense's proposition is overruled. Please continue, witness."

"Thank you very much."

Pollo dipped his head to the judges.

The lawyer crumpled back into his chair. He looked like a doll, stripped of his soul. As expected, Tizzano looked grim as he sat next to him.

Pollo spoke into the microphone and his voice echoed around the

silent courtroom.

“Why have I been unable to speak the truth in today’s trial up until now? My reason is that I have been the target of intimidation by a certain group of people.”

At the word “intimidation”, the courtroom filled with murmurs once again.

“…What a cowardly tactic. They employed such measures in a venerated court of law in order to silence me. ‘Don’t you dare speak the truth—-or else, we’ll kill someone you care about.’ I will declare to you all now who it was that committed this cowardly act…”

Pollo pointed to him with determination in his eyes.

“It was him!”

Every person in the room followed his gaze.

The one Pollo was pointing to was none other than the man at the prosecution bench, Falco.

“…? Mr. Pollo?”

Falco stared with his mouth hanging open, dumbfounded.

“Look at him, everyone. This is the cowardly man who ruined me, the man who set up me and those 32 innocent people as members of Passione, who also took my half-sister hostage—Prosecutor Falco. This is the man I hate most in the entire world!”

The courtroom fell into complete silence.

Nobody could grasp the situation that unfolded before them.

The room was so silent that one could hear a pin drop—until finally, one spectator spoke up.

“Hey… W-What’d that guy just say?”

“He took his half-sister hostage?”

“Falco? He’d never…”

The chatter that filled the courtroom was the loudest it had been since the beginning of the trial. Spectators began back-and-forth discussions with the people around them.

“Order in the court. Quiet, please. Audience!”

Even when the judge yelled loudly enough for his voice to echo, the talking didn’t stop.

“Witness, what did you say just now? Please repeat your statement clearly for everyone to hear.”

“All I did was state the truth. Ever since the beginning of the trial, I have been the victim of Falco’s horrific plot. What occurred in this courtroom today was the most extreme part of the plot. Of all the things the man could intimidate me with, he chose my own half-sister to bring here! It was all done to display my sister as a hostage to me!”

“Wh… What are you saying?! I would never—”

Prosecutor Falco jumped to his feet. No camera had ever captured his visage looking as panicked as it was now. It seemed he truly had no idea what was happening.

The courtroom was filled with chaos.

And it appeared the witness Pollo himself was in a similar state. He covered his mouth, looking panicked at his own testimony. Then, he pointed to Falco once again.

“It was him! He’s the real criminal! Take this goddamned prosecutor out of here in cuffs!”

It seemed only two people in the entire courtroom knew what was going on. One was Tizzano, calmly sitting next to the dumbfounded lawyer.

The other was the young man sitting in the spectator area…

I’ve activated my Stand. Looks like it’s all going as you predicted, Tizza.

He was Squalo, Tizzano’s accomplice. He could see straight into Pollo’s mouth. Something clung to the man’s red tongue as he rambled frantically. It was Tizzano’s Talking Head. Using his own Stand, Clash, Squalo had carried Talking Head to Pollo’s mouth.

Everything had proceeded exactly as Tizzano had laid it out.

They had captured Pollo’s little sister to keep his mouth shut.

And Falco had gotten her back.

It was all as Tizzano had predicted.

Chapter 5

After the first public hearing drew to a close, Squalo and Tizzano rendezvoused in a hotel room. Leaning on Tizzano's chest and recalling the earlier events of the trial, Squalo spoke.

"Ah, Tizzano, it was all according to your plan… Pollo kept his mouth shut. As long as we have his little sister in our grasp, I doubt he'll talk at the trial."

"No, Squalo." Tizzano shook his head as he caressed Squalo's chin. "It's time I told you something. It's about what you'll do at the second public hearing. Odds are Falco will take Pollo's little sister back. He'll use his detectives…"

"Take her back? Why? I doubt Falco and his team know anything about the little sister. Are you saying we're going to leak the info ourselves?"

"No, we won't leak it. If we leak it so easily, it'll attract suspicion. We don't need to do anything at all. Falco will find out about Pollo's little sister anyway…"

"…What makes you say that?"

"Listen to me, Squalo. This is not something we can do carelessly. Our opponent is Prosecutor Falco. Don't ever allow yourself to think that we can get the upper hand on him in a court of law. Any info we can get will naturally come to him right away. The only

advantage we have is our Stand abilities. He's going to take back the little sister, and then we'll fight him directly. Talking Head…"

A small Stand appeared atop Tizzano's palm. Squalo knew that in terms of raw power, it was among the weakest of all Stands. It lacked the strength to lift even a single bag. The Stand was so weak, in fact, that it struggled to move on its own. But concepts such as "strong" and "weak" could not be assigned to Stands based on power alone. A king and a cook are excellent in their own roles, but worthless in the other's.

"You're going to hook that through the traitor's tongue using my Clash just like always, aren't you?"

"Yes… The prosecutors, lawyers, and judges in this case are all human. They're nothing like the goddess of justice with a sword in one hand and a book of law in the other. People like them don't have the all-seeing eyes of the gods; they have no way of truly separating fact from fiction. That is why humanity created the courtroom. So they could hear stories and testimony and make a guess at the truth. That way, there's no need for violence. The only weapon one wields is the sword of language. And there is no Stand more apt for that environment than my own."

Squalo gazed at Talking Head. Among the team, Tizzano's Stand in particular was looked down upon the most by the leader, who asked what such a diminutive and weak Stand could ever be capable of.

"Tizzano, the leader wants me to go through with killing you even now. He doesn't care whether the mission succeeds or fails…"

"Don't let it get to you, Squalo. Just answer and swear your allegiance to him, even if you don't mean it."

"But even doing that is painful for me. He doesn't understand how powerful you are at all…"

"As long as there's even one person who understands, that's enough

for me," Tizzano whispered into Squalo's ear. "When our Stands come together, you and I are invincible, Squalo."

He covered his mouth and gave the signal, just like he said he would.

Squalo's Clash had the ability to teleport instantly from one liquid to another. Witness testimonies can stretch on for a long time, causing many to bring a drink with them to the stand. It was a confirmed fact that Pollo had brought up a bottle of water during the first trial. Squalo had been told to smuggle Talking Head and Clash into the courtroom inside of his thermos. Clash was only capable of traveling one to two meters in a leap. The gap to Pollo was wider than that, forcing Squalo to let his thermos roll down to the railing first. He had Clash leap inside of Pollo's bottle; now, Talking Head was hooked through Pollo's tongue.

…By attaching itself to his tongue, it makes everything he says come out as the opposite—no, it forces his soul to tell lies. Tizzano, that is the sole ability of your Stand. But with that ability alone, your Stand is more powerful than any other in this place!

Prosecutor Falco had carried out extensive, secret communication with converts, gaining their absolute trust. Traitors of the gangs

trusted Falco and came to trust him as their one and only friend.

However, Pollo didn't quite trust Falco yet. His failure to tell Falco about his little sister served as proof. Tizzano had her abducted for that very reason. He gambled on Falco rescuing her. That was the moment when Pollo came to fully trust Falco.

And Tizzano used that trust against him.

Pollo's feelings of admiration and gratitude were twisted into declarations of Falco's evil nature. The more he tried to expose the defense, the more he sang their praises.

Now they've completely swapped positions here in this court.

Squalo noticed Tizzano putting a hand to his left ear as he sat at the defense bench. It was one of the cues they had come up with before the trial. There was already a perfect opportunity to strike. He was declaring now to be the time.

"You have to believe me! Everything I'm saying is true! P-Please…"

Pollo was shouting, his voice edged with desperation.

Rip him up, Clash!

In the next instant, blood sprayed from Pollo's mouth. Screams rang out from the spectator area, and the judges tensed up. Something fell from his bloody mouth and landed with a plop. It was the base of his tongue, sliced into countless pieces. He fell to his knees and collapsed into a pool of his own blood.

Nearby court clerks approached him. After covering his mouth, they carried him out of the courtroom. But his body didn't so much as twitch—it was clear at a glance to everyone that he was beyond saving.

Even the normally unflappable judge seemed panicked as he took the microphone.

“Recess. The court will hold a recess—”

A loud voice echoed across the courtroom, interrupting him.

“Prosecutor Falco! Give us an explanation for what just happened!”

The one at the microphone was Tizzano, speaking from the defense bench.

“The defense believes that the testimony this man risked this life to give cannot be overlooked. Do you plan to come to the next hearing with evidence for your innocence? I demand an explanation, right now, in this very court!”

As if trying to prevent his escape, he kept pressing Falco.

“That’s right!”

Jeers rose from the spectators.

“Explain yourself right here, right now!”

“Don’t run away, Prosecutor Falco!”

“Hold him accountable!”

“Swear in this courtroom and tell us the truth!”

“Falco!”

“Falco!”

“Falco!”

The courtroom was flooded with the spectators’ angry cries.

…Did he anticipate all this? A man can only be so meticulous…

The first spectators to heckle Falco were all plants paid off by Tizzano prior to the trial. But now, the outrage had spread to the normal spectators. They failed to heed even the judges’ calls.

Accusatory glares were being thrown at Falco by even his fellow prosecutors now.

This hearing had transformed into Falco’s impeachment trial in the blink of an eye.

Falco picked up the microphone. He did not flee. Was it because of the constant barrage of criticism? Or could it be his ten years’ experience as a prosecutor?

Everybody listened closely to hear what he had to say.

In an instant, the room became completely and utterly silent.

Falco slowly began to speak, claiming—no, attempting to claim his innocence.

“I remember it all vividly. I am the criminal who coerced Pollo.”

Everyone in the courtroom—the judges, lawyer, prosecutors, and police officers—was shocked, their eyes widening. The man’s words were so clear that they couldn’t help but believe them.

The man confessed to his crimes as if they were something to be proud of, saying he had nothing to be ashamed of.

Pollo's blood was still scattered about the courtroom. After having leapt into one pool of it, Clash had once again served its purpose. Talking Head was already hooked into Prosecutor Falco's tongue.

"It's just as Mr. Pollo said."

Prosecutor Falco's voice sounded clearly throughout the courtroom.

"Everything he said was correct. I called his half-sister to this place and intimidated him. Naturally, the 32 defendants are all innocent. They are not members of Passione, nor any other gang. The police and I worked frantically to frame them. I believe it would be best to release them as soon as possible."

"…!"

It seemed there were still some people who clung to their belief in Falco in the courtroom. Falco was an excellent prosecutor who had an impressive track record. There was always the possibility that Pollo was simply trying to ruin Falco. But that possibility crumbled away when Falco made his own testimony. Here on this great stage of law, he was openly confessing to every one of his crimes.

"Prosecutor Falco, do you really mean that…?"

The bailiff's hoarse voice rang out.

Falco's reply came loud and clear.

"Of course I do! I swear to God that every word I say is true!"

As the frenzied people of the courtroom stared at the spectacle, Squalo sat, satisfied.

Tizzano planned for this as well. Dealing with the witness, Pollo, is simple. But if we left it at that, more traitors could always crop up, and

we'd always end up facing off with Falco. That's why we've taken the one lawyer who represents all of Italy… and brought that divine reputation of his lower than a toilet bowl. By shaking its prosecutors' very foundation, we'll make it so that this country can never rise up against gangs again.

A judge shouted for recess, his voice booming. Yet Falco kept speaking, his passion only escalating. The clerks, unable to simply stand by and watch, approached to stop him.

"I… I'm speaking the truth! Everything I'm saying is the absolute truth!!"

Squalo looked at the defense bench. Tizzano was touching his left ear once again. It was the signal to finish the job.

Now's our chance.

Clash was standing by in the blood spatter. He would make it leap into Falco's mouth and take him out as it retrieved Talking Head. It was all over.

But then something happened.

As he stood at the prosecutor bench, Falco turned to look at Squalo. His eyes widened. To observers, it would have looked like he was simply looking at the spectator area. But to Squalo, it was obvious. Without a doubt, Falco was looking straight at him.

…?!

A chill instantly ran down Squalo's spine. There was no way a non-Stand user like him could understand what he and Tizzano were doing. Even so, he got the sense that the man had figured out exactly what was happening.

Next, Falco's gaze fell on the defense bench. He was looking straight

at…

…Tizzano!

He remembered what Tizzano had said before.

“This is not something we can do carelessly. Our opponent is Prosecutor Falco.”

Clash! Chew his tongue into ribbons!

Just then, Falco covered his mouth as if on instinct. Clash was unable to travel to liquids when they were covered. Would it be Falco who came out on top or Clash?

The next instant, an unimaginable amount of blood came gushing from behind Falco’s hand. He fell across the desk. Screams rang out.

…!

Sweat ran down Squalo’s cheeks.

He saw Tizzano at the edge of his vision. There was a faint look of relief on his face. His expression seemed to say, *excellent job exterminating him* .

You’re wrong, Tizza.

The sweat from his cheeks slowly dripped onto the floor. It had happened at the absolute last second. Falco had covered his mouth at the absolute last second before Clash leapt at it from the floor. Clash was still swimming in Pollo’s blood, even now!

I haven’t done it yet…

Falco slowly raised his head from the desk.

I haven't chewed his tongue into ribbons yet!

Falco opened his mouth, and something red fell to the floor with a plop. It was his tongue, with Talking Head still hooked through. He had bit it off himself.

"If's nof over yef."

Falco stared straight at Squalo as he spoke. He coughed up blood.

"…!"

The prison officers around the blood-drenched Falco tried to approach him, but he waved them away.

"No maffer how you fry to deceive us, you'll never win."

He pointed at Squalo, then Tizzano.

"Jusfice will prevail. Anf when if does, you'll burn in Hell—"

Clash!

Those became his final words. Clash leapt into Falco's blood and ripped his tongue into shreds from the bottom up. A fountain of blood spewed from his mouth, his eyes rolled back into his head, and he fell flat on his back.

Squalo quietly observed the courtroom as it descended into a cacophony of screams.

Chapter 6

Gilberto Falco was once a famous prosecutor who represented Italy and captured countless gangsters. That reputation made an about-face with the events of this trial. Instead, he became known as a man who captured, intimidated, and forced confessions out of innocents. His crimes sent tremors through the Italian justice system like nothing had before.

Due to Pollo's confession, a second investigation was opened into the case of the people who had been arrested for suspected ties to Passione. The previous investigation had been primarily

spearheaded by Falco; much of the gathered evidence was rendered void out of a lack of confidence. By the trial's end, nearly all 32 of the defendants were declared not guilty and released.

Thus ended the great trial. The true scale of Passione would remain utterly shrouded in mystery.

Chapter 7

With this, Squalo and Tizzano's job was finished. The implications of this trial would most likely reach the furthest edges of the justice system. It was also thought that decades of anti-gang legislation would heavily regress. Italy would fall right into Passione's hands—that notion, too, seemed like it could become reality.

Squalo and his companion distanced themselves from the chaotic site of the trial and headed to Palermo's market. After reaching a pay phone at the end of the road, Squalo called his leader to give a mission report. The conclusion Tizzano had led the trial to was the best-case scenario for the group.

But all the leader had to say was this:

"I see. Stick with the plan and kill Tizzano with Clash after this."

When Squalo asked why, his leader responded:

"This was just a fluke. Tizzano doesn't have that kind of power."

"…"

In other words, the leader refused to believe in Tizzano's strength to

the very end. The conversation ended with Squalo failing to change his mind. Squalo looked to the man standing right next to him. Tizzano, who had heard the whole conversation, now had a pensive look on his face.

“So that’s how it is. My orders were to kill you, whether the mission ended in success or failure. And if I disobey his orders, odds are he’ll come after me, too.”

Tizzano hummed in thought, raising a hand to his chin.

“Then our only option is to try and convince him. Don’t worry—I have ways to negotiate. I can probably win the other members over, too. We’ll resolve things peacefully.”

“Resolve things peacefully? Win them over? You’re being too soft, Tizzano.”

Squalo offhandedly gave voice to the thoughts he had been having since the trial.

“I’m going to kill him.”

He had decided at the trial’s beginning to kill the leader as soon as it adjourned.

“…Calm down, Squalo. That’s not a good plan of action. We’ll be the ones put in danger. Doing something like that would be the same as rebelling against Passione itself.”

“That won’t happen. No, there’s no way it could.”

“…How come?”

“Our leader’s feeling cornered. He’s been struggling to get his assets back lately, and his payments to the top brass are overdue. His

insistence on my killing you is just more proof of that. He'll do anything to prove that he's getting something done to his superiors. What use is a man as short-sighted as him to Passione… to the boss?

"I'm positive the boss will be satisfied with how things have gone here. Your power acts as Passione's shield, but it can also be its sword. It is the people who look down upon your power who are a cancer on this organization. They must be removed as soon as possible."

It fought not with violence, but words. It was a new kind of strength for Squalo, one different from the many he had encountered thus far. He had absolute faith that Tizzano would become the very core of their organization.

"It seems you have a habit of getting a bit too fired up about things, Squalo. Not to mention, my Stand is miniscule. On my own, it's a struggle to move it far away, or even kill a baby. But your Clash changes everything."

Squalo and Tizzano quietly looked into each other's eyes as they walked together. There was no need for words. They both knew exactly what the other was thinking.

Together, the wielders of Clash and Talking Head were invincible.

There was just one thing that concerned Squalo.

What did Falco mean by those words he said in his final moments?

Justice will prevail.

Why? He should have known that he was going to die the moment he bit off his own tongue. So why did he seem so full of willpower? What pushed him?

The pair would later find themselves in a fierce battle with a traitor once again. Those questions welled up in Squalo's chest. He would never know their answers in his lifetime.

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